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Interview: Barrymore

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Gordon Goodman as "Barrymore"

The Good People Theater Company is getting sweet attention from audiences and critics for its latest production of "Barrymore" at the Greenway Court Theatre. Ben Miles, theater writer for the Beachcomber, recently interviewed the show's director, Janet Miller, and the actor who plays the title role, Gordon Goodman.

Beachcomber: What motivated you to select and commit to "Barrymore"?

Janet Miller: We, the Good People Theater Company, were looking for a play to dovetail with our production of "A Man of No Importance" by Terrence McNally, Stephen Flaherty, and Lynn Ahrens. We considered David Mamet's "A Life in the Theater," but we couldn't get the rights.

We wanted to send a valentine to the theater and many people had recommended William Luce's "Barrymore." But to do a show like "Barrymore," you have to have the right actor. Fortunately, I knew Gordon Goodman, and I knew he'd be perfect for the role.

Gordon Goodman: I wanted to do this character since I saw Christopher Plummer do it in Los Angeles, and I'd always - since I first saw him in "Grand Hotel" - been struck by the naturalness of John Barrymore's acting.

BCR: What are your plans and goals for this production?

JM: [Laughing] We're going to take over the world. But seriously, it would be wonderful if we could take it around to other theaters, maybe colleagues.



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We love doing it. So, if anybody's got any ideas, we want to hear them.

GG: The initial plan was just to get (the show) on its feet. I knew it was a gamble. I wouldn't have taken the part if it wasn't. But it was never in my mind that it would be mediocre. All an actor can do is his best, and I also knew that there'd be no in-between with "Barrymore." It would either succeed or fall flat on its face.

JM: I wouldn't cast an actor that was unable to handle a part. But I wasn't sure "Barrymore" would play to younger audiences, but what we've realized is that this is an archetypal story about the perks and perils of celebrity.

BCR: What were/are the greatest challenges in mounting and performing "Barrymore"?

GG: To portray him in three dimensions was my challenge. I'm a psychologist (by profession) and what interests me is that we behave a certain way because we believe in certain things. To get inside this John Barrymore's head, to understand him, was the great challenge here. John B. Barrymore, great-grandson of Barrymore, praised the performance. That meant the world to me.

JM: You know you could just go for the cheap laughs. There are plenty of those opportunities in "Barrymore," but we wanted to show the reality of Barrymore, the man.

BCR: Are there other plays and characters that you plan to be performing (together or apart)?

JM: Our company does small, lesser-known musicals. I know that we'll continue doing musicals, but given any opportunity to work with Gordon, I'll jump at it.

GG: I'd consider doing "Man of La Mancha" (by Wasserman, Darion, and Leigh), or perhaps "King Lear." I've never done Shakespeare.

"Barrymore" closed at Los Angeles' Green Court Theatre on December 1 (read a review at www.longbeachcomber.com). For further information, or to contribute ideas and suggestions for future venues for a "Barrymore" staging, visit www.goodpeopletheaterco.org.

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